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arrived at this plantation to look for work. Led by their chiefs, they had made the long journey from the region of their homes. The chiefs, some of whom had met us in the Chaco, whilst others had only heard of us, wished to pay us a call. Personally I do not possess any notes about this reception, but I have come across some in Fries' diary. He thus refers to the incident: »When the Choroti Indians, whom we knew from Tatarenda and who were now working here, saw us, they came, almost to a man, and greeted us, being evidently very glad to meet us again. *The principal chief, at the head of all the lesser caziques*, was among those who came and paid us their respects.»[1]

A favoured position in the village community is that held by the medicine men; for their services they are rewarded by a — from a Choroti point of view — generous remuneration in the form of food and drink. That among the Choroti the medicine men are held in great esteem, and that everybody is anxious to be on good terms with them, appears only natural to anyone with a knowledge of what an important part magical conceptions play with these Indians. It is largely by the Finlander explorer, Rafael Karsten — oft-quoted in the present work — that ethnological science has been enriched by information and detailed reports on the magical customs and practices of the Choroti, as well as of other Chaco tribes.[3]

The Choroti Indians believe that man, all his life through, is more or less subject to influences from spirits, who, on the whole, are of a harmful nature. Especial danger is to be apprehended from spirits on certain occasions such as child-birth, pubescence and death. Usually the evil is worked by a spirit, »mohsek», entering a person through one of the orifices of his body and thereby assuming possession of him. If at birth a child is deformed or very sickly, it is supposed to be possessed by some evil »moshek», and is on that account killed.[4] When a girl has attained the age of puberty, during the first critical, time she must keep a covering over her head, so that no evil spirit may be able to enter her body by way of her nose, mouth, eyes or ears.[4] The occasion of a girl attaining puberty is celebrated with a dance which undoubtedly is of a magical character.

[1] Professor Robert Fries: diary, X, p. 14. Italics by von Rosen.
[3] See Bibliography attached.
[3] Karsten (4), p. 170.
[4] Karsten (4), p. 165.

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process and the other procreative functions of the woman is realized. The attainment of puberty therefore for the Indian girl certainly means the beginning of her sexual life, but at the same time it means her entrance into a very critical epoch of development, during which she is often — especially at child-birth and during the following menses — exposed to supernatural dangers. Hence the initiation ceremonies at puberty have for their object partly her direct protection against these dangers for the time being, partly her purification once for all from the evils associated with her sexual functions during the years to come or — to express it more plainly — to *harden* her against evil spirits. From this point of view we have to regard all puberty ceremonies of the Indians, even such practices as painting, scarification, and tattooing of the body or face, often undertaken with girls on the attainment of puberty.

In the dances and conjurations performed in honour of girls at puberty it is the women who, contrary to what is generally the rule in religious ceremonies, play the most prominent part. Among the *Choroti* the puberty of girls is celebrated with a magical dance called *Káusima* after the instrument which the women use for it; the instrument is called *káhuis*. The *káhuis* is a dancing-staff, two or three meters in length, made of a light kind of wood or bamboo, which has a bunch of deer's hoofs tied at the top. These rattles produce a hollow sound when the staff is struck on the ground and are supposed to possess a mysterious power to influence the spirits. This power of course must be explained from the fact that to the Choroti the deer is a demoniacal animal. The *káhuis* staff is the only magical instrument used by the Choroti women and it is never handled by the men.

The dance begins at the first new moon after the appearance of the signs of puberty, because the moon is believed to cause and have great influence upon the menstruation of women. It is performed every day until the following new moon, sometimes even still longer. At a *Káusima* dance which I witnessed the arrangement was as follows. The mother of the girl and some other elderly women formed a circle, or rather an elliptic ring, outside the hut where the girl was, each holding her rattling dancing staff. Close to the ring four medicine-men were sitting at equal distances from one another, holding their rattle gourds (*pelíte*). There were besides two more medicine-men standing up, each provided with a drum. During the dance the women moved round ceremoniously with slow, regular steps, chanting loudly and marking time with their rattle staffs which they struck on the ground. The men outside the ring also chanted, shaking

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their rattle gourds, whilst the men provided with drums beat them. The girl in whose honour the dance was held was standing motionless and silent at the entrance of the hut reclining against the wall and had to remain so during the whole ceremony. Sometimes, when towards evening she got tired and was on the point of falling asleep, one of the medicine-men came up to her and shook his rattle close to her face as if to keep her awake. The ceremony began in the afternoon and was continued with short pauses throughout the whole evening until midnight. I was informed that as long as the dance goes on the girl need not be veiled, but as soon as the conjuration is finished for the night she must have her face and her whole body well covered. During the whole period that the dance is performed she is moreover obliged to fast, avoiding fish and meat and living only on some light vegetable food.

I may add that all the men who took part in the ceremony were painted on the face in one way or another. Some of them simply had the face coated red with roucou or black with charcoal, whereas others had X-shaped or other patterns painted on the cheeks. The men's faces are always painted in this way at the conjurations of the Indians, and these paintings have a purely magical significance.

The drinking of algaroba beer also forms part of the magical practices at the feast, but it is strictly limited to the men.

The object of all these ceremonies is to protect the girl against the evil spirits, the *möhsek*, by which she is believed to be particularly attacked during her unclean condition. The spirits try to enter into her through the face — especially through those parts where there is a natural opening of the body, such as the eyes, the ears, the nose, and the mouth — and also through the ventral parts, the consequence being, if they succeed in doing so, that she will fall ill and die, or become supernaturally pregnant and give birth to a monster. It is in this way that the Indians account for the birth of those deformed children which they kill directly after birth. To prevent such frightful accidents the girl's head and body are covered after the conjuration is finished for the night. By means of the dancing, chanting, drumming, etc. the evil demons who take an interest in the girl and swarm about her are conjured and rendered harmless. According to the idea of the Indians she is not only protected for the time being against their attacks, but she will also retain a certain power of resistance against them in the future.

The puberty of a girl is not celebrated in all cases among the Choroti with so many ceremonies as in the case just described, but the

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Painting by E. Wassén

The *Káuslma*, a magic dance of the, Choroti, performed in the honour of girls at puberty. The girl is standing at the entrance of the hut.

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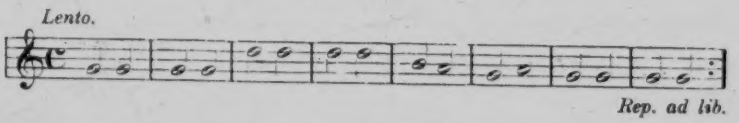
Kausīma dance is always obligatory. Thus in a case which came under my notice the dance was performed by a middle-aged woman who, holding the dancing-staff (*káhuis*) in her right hand, proceeded with slow regular steps backwards and forwards in front of the house, where the girl, in whose »honour» the dance was performed, was sitting motionless. The woman accompanied her dance with a peculiar monotonous chant marking time, as usual, with the *káhuis*. Sometimes one of the small girls went and joined her, holding the dancing-staff together with her and walking in the same time. The dance and chant was begun at sunset and continued with short intervals till midnight. The melody of the chant which was repeated over and over again, was the following:



It is evident that the object of the dance was to drive away or keep off the evil *mōhsek* who were trying to harm the girl.

Exactly the same custom prevails among the neighbours of the Choroti in the south, the Ashluslay Indians, who in their culture are so closely related to the Choroti. The fact that the rattling dancing-staffs form a magical instrument peculiar to the Chaco tribes, may also be inferred from the puberty ceremonies in vogue among the *Lenguas* of Paraguay. These ceremonies are shortly described by Mr. Barbrooke Grubb, but since he gives no explanation of their significance I may mention them in this connection, with more reason since the Lenguas are culturally closely related to the Indians of the Mataco-Choroti group. The main dance is, as among the Choroti, performed by the women who circle round the girl to be initiated, chanting and marking time with their rattle staffs. A troop of lads, dressed in ostrich plumes and wearing masks to represent evil spirits, issue from the forest, running one behind the other in a serpentine formation, move in and out among the crowd, jingling bunches of hoofs and from time to time uttering prolonged shrill cries. At their near approach the women dance and chant with increasing vigour round the girl pretending to protect her and to drive off the masked »spirits» [1]). The idea just indicated by me with regard to the Choroti, namely, that the young woman will, through the initiation, become permanently har-

[1]) Grubb, *op. cit.* p. 178.

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odd appearance which the charcoal gives the face acts as a deterrent; but probably some mysterious magical properties are also ascribed to the soot or charcoal itself. Black is held to be a more powerful means of inspiring evil demons with fear than other colours: hence it has especially become the colour of sorrow: for the spirits of the recently departed, or the demons who cause disease and death, are, after all, the most dreaded of all supernatural beings.

Even ornamental painting may be applied after a death. Thus an old woman had painted a small arrow in brown colour on each cheek in the evening of the day a brother of hers had died. The true significance of this face-painting may be inferred from the fact that in the same evening all the inhabitants of the village carried arrows or sticks in their hands when they moved about outside their huts, and that the nearest relatives of the dead, who had abandoned the house of death, had made themselves a whole fence of arrows stuck in the ground, inside which they spent the night. The object of these precautions was professedly to keep off the death-demon, and the same was certainly the object of the ornamental arrows painted on the woman's cheeks. The Indians in fact believe that they can intimidate their supernatural foes in the same way as their natural enemies.

Lastly, the Tobas, like other South American Indians, are in the habit of painting the body before they march out to battle. This kind of body-painting has already been described in connection with Indian warfare.

The facial paintings of the *Choroti* show a greater variety of design than those of the Tobas. These ornamental designs are applied for feasts and dances, and since the latter in many cases have apparently a profane character, it may seem to a superficial observer as if the body-painting of the Choroti had for its object only to embellish the appearance. Such a conclusion however would be a mistake, since the Choroti dances, as we have seen, are in really in their nature a sort of magical conjuration. Similarly, the feasts held in the honour of young girls at puberty have a purely religious significance. At a feast of this kind where I was present most of the men who took part in the ceremonies had painted on their faces ornamental designs in red and black colours. Many of them had painted on each cheek an X-shaped design which is frequently met with in the ornamental art of the South American Indians and which is evidently nothing but an impressionistic drawing of the human body, representing for instance the breast and the stomach, of

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C 302 881 the body of some animal. The magical nature of these ornaments was likewise obvious.

M 302 789 Among the *Mataco*, who in general are more addicted to religion and superstition than the Choroti, the character of facial painting as a magical charm is more conspicuous. These Indians give facial painting different names according as it is used by men or women and depending on its colour. Thus the red painting of women is called *eruháh*, whereas M [765] the red painting of the men is called *oviitláh* (a name evidently derived from the word *aittáh* demon). The black painting is called *letáh*. It is especially used as a sign of sorrow. When a Mataco man dies, his widow and daughters blacken their faces with charcoal, regarding this as a protection against the death-demon. Similarly, for some time after a death the younger men every evening perform the dance *Katináh*, and M [751] all those taking part in the dance have their faces blackened. — The red painting again is applied as a means of giving the body strength and as a direct protection against evil spirits causing sickness.

M 301 789 Many *personal ornaments* of the Chaco Indians, for instance ear-tubes, necklaces, feather ornaments etc., are of the nature of charms or amulets against evil spirits. The feather ornaments most customary among the Chaco tribes are ostrich plumes, and these, as I have shown in my *Civilization of the South American Indians* have originally not been decorations in the civilized sense of the word, but magical charms, a character which they still preserve for instance among such tribes as the Chamacoco and Lenguas in Paraguay. Among the Choroti, who likewise at their great feasts in December and January wear great ostrich plumes as ornaments, this is not equally conspicuous in accordance with the fact that in many cases the Choroti culture shows traces of an incipient degeneration. On the other hand, in the description I have M [756] given before of a Mataco dance performed to conjure disease demons and in which the sorcerers had ostrich feathers fastened to the ankles, wrists, head, and waist,[1]) the »mystic» significance of these »ornaments» is quite obvious. Similarly, when another writer states that the Mataco in some parts of the Argentine Chaco not only use ostrich plumes as head-ornaments, but also apply them to the face as a sort of beard, which gives them a grotesque and ferocious appearance, or wear them round the wrists in the way of bracelets,[2]) one cannot fail to recognize superstitious motives behind these arrangements

[1]) See *supra*, p. 137.

[2]) Baldrich, *Las comarcas vírgenes*, p. 231.